

Coins

Steel yourself! The Lincoln cent may be fake

By Roger Boye

Q—I HAVE A 1944 Lincoln cent with a rim that looks as if it is made of steel. Is there a chance the coin actually is made out of steel? And would it be worth anything?—G. P., Western Springs.

A—Because of a copper shortage during World War II, 1943 cents were made of steel coated with zinc. The following year, mintage of copper cents was resumed.

Apparently, however, a few copper cents dated 1943 were made accidentally by the United States Mint, and a few steel cents dated 1944 also were made because of a mint mistake. Such error coins are major collector items.

But many fake 1944 steel cents exist, too. Some of the fakes are copper cents which have been treated with a chemical, giving the coins a steel-looking appearance. Using the proper equipment, the fake cents can be detected.

The odds are very high that your cent is not an authentic 1944 steel cent, but a fake and

thus worthless to a collector.

Q—This is like taking a leap in the dark, but I thought it was worth a try. In regards to the person from Berwyn who had a \$1,000 bill [you answered his question a few weeks ago], I would very much like to contact him to buy his bill. Would you send me his address?—J. W., Sterling.

A—Sorry, I don't reveal the names of letter writers. The purpose of the column is to supply information, not to act as a buyer-seller clearinghouse.

Q—I've saved every old coin that I got my hands on during the last two years. Now I don't know what to use to clean them and make them look bright. Will you please tell me what will clean them best?—C. M., Chicago.

A—Most experts advise amateurs not to clean coins, and many collectors don't save coins that have been cleaned. Often, poorly cleaned coins are worth less to collectors.

In short, don't clean them. You'll probably regret it if you do.

Q—In 1970 the Franklin Mint issued a set of 36 presidential commemorative medals, which it termed the American Express edition. Each medal is 39 mm. in size and contains 500 grains of silver. Is there a market for these medals today? If the answer is yes, would you hazard a guess as to the present value of the set? Who would be an interested buyer?—E. T., Chicago.

A—Your medals are listed in "Guidebook of Franklin Mint Issues . . . 1976 Edition," by Chester L. Krause who says the American Express edition was issued at a price of \$6.25 per medal or \$225 for the 36-piece set. Each medal had a mintage of 60,709.

Krause estimates the current market value of each medal at the issue price, except for the John F. Kennedy medal which is valued at \$10.

It is sometimes difficult to sell medals. Occasionally, someone advertises in a coin newspaper or magazine, wanting to buy medals. I am sending you the "medals wanted" advertisements from a recent issue of a coin newspaper.